

My Trip to the Grain Elevator

It is August 15, 1948, the day after my ninth birthday, and I am anxious to get going! When I turned nine years old, Papa said I could go with him to the LOUISVILLE GRAIN ELEVATOR! We will be taking our wheat grain there so it can be stored in the elevator and then sent on its way by train or truck to Denver.

Papa says we have had good weather for the harvest—not too much rain—so the wheat is ripe and not wet. It needs to have just the right amount of moisture in it. If it has too much we have to wait because wet grain can cause combustion in the elevator and cause an explosion, dangerous to the men working there.

I find a new pair of overalls on the foot of my bed. Mama must have known I would need them for my trip today. I smell her good French toast cooking and some bacon frying from the pigs we raise. Mama has already been up since 5:30 and milked our dairy cattle with the milking machines. She works hard, right along with my father. My sister who is 10 years old helps Mama with the chickens, the cream separator, the cooking, and she drives the tractor at haying time. We raise some beef cattle, too. But Papa says our wheat is the most important crop for money making. It's called Turkey Red Wheat and it's good for growing on dry land like we have. Today's the day, and I'm so excited to be with Papa on our truck to deliver the grain!

Our farm sits on a hill where we can look out and see the mountains to the West. The sky is clear and blue, just like it's been for about three weeks. A pair of red wing blackbirds sing their trilling song as they protect their meadow down by Coal Creek south of the farm. I like to see if I can spot the red under their wings when they fly.

I look out to the north and see two combines in the wheat fields. We are lucky to have good neighbors who bring their combine to our place and help us with the harvest. We all help each other out this way because there is just a certain amount of time to harvest before the late August rains begin. The combines cut the wheat stalks and also thresh the grain. That is, they take the grain off the stalks. Then there is an arm on the combine that shoots the grain into one of our farm trucks.

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Papa says, "David, shake a leg, son! We're off to the elevator!" Our county elevator is important to our town. It's over forty years old—older than my Dad! The trip takes about 20 minutes, but at the elevator we have to wait in line another 20 minutes. Charlie Thomas is running our elevator. His brother Quentin is in the office. Charlie directs the trucks to come up onto the ramp under the shed on the west side of the elevator. That's where the scale is that will weigh our wheat load.

When it is our turn Papa carefully drives the truck onto the ramp. When we reach the right spot, he puts on the brake. Charlie checks the scale to see how much our truck and its load weigh. He also checks the moisture and the density of the heads of grain with a special smaller scale. Then the whole front end of our truck rises up on a lift so the load of wheat in the truck can slip out into a grated bin. Charlie has to weigh our empty truck then to see the difference from the first weighing. This tells him how much the grain itself weighed so we can get paid for it.

We don't have time to look around the elevator to see how it works, so Papa tells me what happens to the grain once it is in the pit below the scale. What happens then is that it is lifted by little paddles on a chain inside a tube up to the top of the elevator and whisked into separate bins—a bin for each kind of grain brought in—maybe wheat, maybe barley, maybe corn. This lift machine is noisy and very dusty! If it is wheat, it is cleaned and dried there and stored until later when it's lifted onto railroad cars by auger and shipped to a much larger terminal elevator in Denver to be ground or milled into flour. The barley and corn are mostly used for animal feed.

We leave then and head back for home. That is just one trip we make this day. We will go two more times today and after the last trip Papa says we can stop in town to see my Uncle Albert and stop at Bungalow Drug for some ice cream. I love this big job we do, and it's fun to be all day with Papa. He says that next year when I'm ten I might be able to drive the truck!

Written by Mary Kay Knorr, Louisville, CO.

With much appreciation to Dorothy Varra and her son David Varra and to Gladys Pilz, all of Louisville, Colorado, for sharing their farm experiences and to Richard Wheeler for his wonderful paper models of the grain elevator.